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SUBJECT: POLICE REESTABLISHMENT PROGRAM: STEADY PROGRESS IN
BRINGING LAW AND ORDER TO RURAL COLOMBIA

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Reestablishment of Police Presence in Conflictive Zones program, which the Uribe Administration initiated with U.S. assistance in 2002, is making significant and steady progress in extending law and order to formerly abandoned municipalities of rural Colombia. The program's major components are reestablishing police stations in these municipalities, providing security enhancements to newly occupied police bases, and deploying mobile Carabinero Squadrons to provide additional operational security capabilities. These initiatives have reduced violent crime and increased public confidence in the government and its police forces in these areas. This is a true partnership, with Colombian financial investment surpassing that of the USG by over 40 percent. The Colombian National Police (CNP) leadership is expanding the program to focus on areas of recent paramilitary demobilization, which will likely lead to future requests for additional USG assistance. END SUMMARY.

POLICE NOW ON DUTY IN ALL 1,099 MUNICIPALITIES

2. (SBU) The Government of Colombia (GOC) has successfully reestablished a police presence in the 165 previously vacant municipalities (equivalents of U.S. counties) of rural Colombia, resulting in a permanent CNP presence in all 1,099 municipalities of the country. The GOC has also deployed a permanent CNP presence to 35 previously abandoned sub-municipality level locations. Each of these newly established municipal police forces consists of between 46-169 personnel, depending on the size of the municipality and local threat level.

3. (SBU) In addition to the police already assigned to these reestablished municipal bases, an initiative is currently underway to train an additional 5,000 municipal patrol police who will base in existing police stations and operate beyond the towns' limits. The first contingent of 1,000 is currently training at the police rural operations training center in Espinal/Piajos, Tolima Department. Upon graduation, these police will be deployed in 50-person units to locations where police planners say demobilized paramilitary units recently operated, and where the GOC fears that other illegal armed groups may try to establish themselves. (NOTE: CNP officials responsible for this training reported to Emboff that significant weapon/equipment shortages exist with the first training contingent, and that subsequent training for the remaining 4,000 police may suffer even more severe equipment and ammunition shortages without additional GOC and/or USG assistance. END NOTE.)

POLICE BASE SECURITY PROGRAM: ENSURING LONG-TERM PRESENCE

4. (SBU) The CNP, with significant USG support, has enhanced municipal police base security by means of both physical improvements and security training initiatives. In terms of physical improvements, the USG has spent thus far approximately USD \$50,000 for equipment and security upgrades to each of the reestablished police bases. Additionally, the USG has provided 10,000 M-16A1 rifles and over 300 M-60 machine guns to better arm these rural police. NAS Interdiction has also donated communications, weapons, and physical upgrades to these facilities.

5. (SBU) Training is the other important element of the municipal police security program. The training includes a newly-established police base security course in Yuto, Choco Department. This course employs the "train-the-trainer" principle, and since January 2006 has trained 28 police trainers. Five additional courses are scheduled for 2006, which will result in a cadre of trainers deployed throughout the country. The course emphasizes patrolling and security operations beyond the actual limitations of the base proper to deter enemy attacks and enhance the confidence and cooperation of local citizens. Mobile training teams travel to individual police bases to provide specialized instruction and tailor base security instruction to the actual threat.

MOBILE CARABINERO SQUADRONS PROVIDE INCREASED FLEXIBILITY

16. (SBU) Since its inception in 2002, the GOC-initiated Mobile Carabinero program trained 54 of 62 Carabinero Squadrons. Each squadron consists of 150 persons to conduct rural missions against illegal armed groups in 28 of Colombia's departments. The average USG investment in each squadron has been approximately USD \$1.5 million, and U.S. Army Special Forces and NAS Project Advisers providing on-the-ground training assistance and tactical advice. The U.S. advisers have also created a 40-person Carabinero cadre responsible for training. The cadre is critical to production of a highly-trained Carabinero force. In addition to the in-country training, NAS has sponsored the attendance of hundreds of Carabineros at specialized training at the U.S. Military's Spanish language training centers (the Army's Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS), and the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA). According to CNP Operations Director General Alberto Ruiz Garcia, these mobile Carabinero forces "now allow police departmental commanders to take the initiative, and not just react like before."

17. (SBU) The Carabinero Squadrons excel at a wide variety of missions, such as rural security. For instance, on several occasions, several squadrons have been task-organized and deployed to go after high-value targets outside their immediate areas of responsibility. Since January 2006, approximately 1200 Carabineros have been deployed to La Macarena National Park to provide security for the GOC's very challenging manual coca eradication initiative.

18. (SBU) In 2005, the CNP purchased a ranch (1740 hectares) located near the police training facility of Espinal for USD \$3.5 million to allow sufficient training area for the seven-week Carabinero field skills course. CNP leadership has also instituted a mandatory two-week Carabinero Familiarization Course for incoming police departmental leaders and has added a Carabinero-specific block of officer instruction in an effort to better familiarize CNP commanders with the capabilities, limitations, and most effective utilization of these new squadrons.

RURAL CRIME DOWN, POLICE SUCCESSES UP, GOOD PUBLIC SUPPORT

19. (SBU) The effectiveness of GOC efforts to enhance the security of rural municipalities is evident in reduced violent crime levels, increased operational successes by police forces and solid public support for the renewed police presence. According to CNP statistics, vehicle hijackings declined by 73 percent, terrorist attacks by 61 percent, kidnappings by 52 percent, and murders by 7 percent in the period 2003-2005. Enhanced effectiveness of rural police operations during the same period resulted in an almost three-fold increase in arrests and weapon seizures in rural areas. Finally, a recent GOC-commissioned poll demonstrated a high degree of public support for the renewed rural police presence: over 77 percent of citizens polled in these municipalities expressed their approval of the return of the police to their communities.

110. (SBU) In recent years, desertions from the various guerrilla and narco-terrorist groups have increased. A recently demobilized mid-level FARC guerrilla currently in the NAS-supported GOC deserter program claimed to Emboff that a primary contributing factor to his and other desertions was the significantly greater security force presence in the countryside. This former guerrilla stated that logistical support from nearby towns was increasingly restricted due both to the police presence in the towns and tighter GOC roadway controls, which had made guerrilla movement much more difficult and dangerous. (NOTE: The number of guerrilla deserters has increased from 327 in 2001 to a yearly average of over 2,300 during the period 2002-2005. Additionally, the percentage of guerrillas who turned themselves in to security forces -- as opposed to other governmental and non-governmental organizations -- rose from just 50 percent in 2001 to over 80 percent in 2005. END NOTE.)

111. (SBU) GOC security gains have been costly in both material and human lives. Twenty-two Carabineros were killed in action in 2004, and Carabinero losses jumped to 61 in 2005 based largely on an increased activity level in high-threat rural areas. This year, in just a few months of operations supporting the manual coca eradication effort in La Macarena, 12 Carabineros have been killed in action. The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and other illegal armed groups have launched a total of 291 attacks against these reestablished police stations since 2002, and a total of 73 municipal police lost their lives as a result.

Nevertheless, none of these newly-secured towns have been lost, and only two were temporarily seized by terrorist forces before being recaptured within hours.

GOC COSTS OF REESTABLISHMENT PROGRAM EXCEED THOSE OF USG

12. (U) The GOC has invested heavily in gaining greater control of rural Colombia. Total expenditures on CNP Reestablishment initiatives have exceeded USD \$115 million since 2002. USG assistance amounted to USD \$79 million during that same period. In addition, this program is essentially nationalized, in that the CNP provides all operations and maintenance funding for the equipment donated by the USG. As the CNP Field Training Center at Pijaos comes on line, most training courses will also be nationalized. USG support to infrastructure development at Pijaos will be essential to ensure that the CNP can train its rural police units in the future.

SECURING FORMER PARAMILITARY AREAS; RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

13. (SBU) Beyond the current initiatives associated with the reestablishment of a police presence in rural municipalities, the GOC and CNP leadership are increasing manpower in recently demobilized paramilitary areas. These initiatives, which include the ongoing training and equipping of the 5,000 municipal patrol police and the potential expansion of Carabinero Squadrons to a total of 100 (38 more than currently resourced), will likely require additional USG support to be successful. While no formal GOC requests for support have yet been made, additional requests for USG support are likely, given both close USG support for these and similar programs in the past and the fact that no GOC funding is yet earmarked for these new programs.

14. (SBU) COMMENT. The Reestablishment of Police Presence in Conflictive Zones that is bearing fruit throughout rural Colombia. The partnership of the GOC and USG in sharing the burden of training, equipping, and advising these police forces has led to a more secure, stable rural environment and a steady reduction in freedom of action of the various narco-terrorist groups in these areas.

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